

BUDGET PCs

Details	Last month's position	First reviewed	PC World-Bench	Price (ex VAT)	Warranty	Processor type/speed	RAM	Hard disk/capacity	Mother-board	Chipset	Modem	USB ports	Monitor	Screen size	Dot pitch	Max resolution @75Hz	Graphics card	Graphics chip	Graphics card memory	Sound card	Speakers	No of speakers/subwoofer	DVD-ROM speed	CD-RW read/write/rewrite rate	Operating system, software & other extras
1 Evesham Axis 1900+ 0870 728 7070 www.evesham.com	1	Apr 02	117 (WB 4)	£1,049	3-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 1900+/ 1.6GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/80GB	Asus A7 A266-E	KT266	56K	2	Samsung 957 DF	19in	0.24mm	1,600x1,200	ATI Radeon 8500 LE	ATI Radeon 8500 LE	64MB	Creative Labs Audigy	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	16x	40x/24x/10x	BigFix, Easy CD Creator, Pinnacle Studio 7.0
2 Atlas Meridian 1700+ PV05 020 8532 6120 www.higrade.com	NEW	May 02	116 (WB 4)	£799	1-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 1700+/ 1.47GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/40GB	MSI nForce 420 Pro	nForce 420D	56K	2	LG Flatron 775FT	17in	0.24mm	1,024x768	onboard	nForce onboard	32MB	onboard nForce	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	10x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2002
3 Mesh Matrix XP 1800 Ti 020 8208 4702 www.meshcomputers.com	2	Feb 02	121 (WB 4)	£999	3-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 1800+/ 1.53GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/60GB	Asus A7 A266-E	KT266	56K	4	Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 740SB	17in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	Leadtek WinFast GeForce3	nVidia GeForce3 Ti 200	64MB	Creative Labs SoundBlaster Live 5.1	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2001
4 Systemax A1900AD 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk	NEW	May 02	116 (WB 4)	£1,029	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1900+/ 1.6GHz	256MB DDR RAM	IBM/60GB	MSI KT266	KT266A	56K	4	CTX EX950F	19in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	nVidia GeForce4 MX-440	nVidia GeForce4 MX-440	64MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394	Videologic ZXR-500	5/Y	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home
5 Multivision Vision Ultima Ti 200 0121 550 8000 www.multivision.co.uk	3	Feb 02	118 (WB 4)	£999	1-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 1900+/ 1.6GHz	512MB DDR RAM	Seagate/60GB	MSI 6380LE Pro2	Via KT266A	56K	6	Hansol 920D	19in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	Hercules 3D Prophet	nVidia GeForce3 Ti 200	64MB	Creative Labs SoundBlaster Live 5.1	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	16x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, Lotus Suite 2001, VideoWave, gamepad, webcam
6 Systemax A1900FA 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk	4	Feb 02	114 (WB 4)	£1,139	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1900+/ 1.6GHz	256MB DDR RAM	IBM/60GB	MSI MS-6380LE	KT266A	56K	2	CTX EX950F	19in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	Gainward GeForce3 Ti 550	nVidia GeForce3 Ti 500	64MB	Creative Labs Audigy	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	16x	32x/16x/10x	Windows XP Home, games, gamepad, ATI TV Wonder VE Lite TV tuner
7 Ideal Computing Ideal Aptus 1800XP 0870 745 5061 www.idealcomputing.co.uk	5	Feb 02	123 (WB 4)	£1,239	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1800+/ 1.53GHz	512MB DDR RAM	IBM/60GB	Chaintech 7CTKJD	AMD 761	56K	2	LG Flatron 775FT	17in	0.24mm	1,024x768	Hercules 3D Prophet III	nVidia GeForce3 Ti 500	64MB	Creative Labs Audigy	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	8x	40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, StarOffice, remote control
8 NEC PowerMate i-Select XL3 A1900+ 0870 010 6326 www.nec-online.com	6	Feb 02	111 (WB 4)	£1,199	3-year onsite	AMD Athlon XP 1900+/ 1.6GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Seagate/80GB	Gigabyte GA-7DX	AMD 761	56K	4	NEC HR-19	19in	0.25mm	1,600x1,200	WinFast Leadtek	nVidia GeForce3	64MB	Creative Labs SoundBlaster Live 5.1	Labtec LCS2632	2/Y	16x	32x/12x/8x	Windows 98 SE, Word, Money, Norton AntiVirus, games bundle, webcam
9 Evesham Axis 1700+ Ti2 0870 728 7070 www.evesham.com	7	Feb 02	110 (WB 4)	£1,199	2-year onsite, 1-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1700+/ 1.47GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Maxtor/40GB	Gigabyte GA-7VTXE/GA-7VTXH	Via KT266A	56K	4	Samsung 107FT flat-panel	17in	0.26mm	1,280x1,024	OEM GeForce2 Ti	nVidia GeForce2 Ti	64MB	Creative Labs SoundBlaster Live 5.1	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	16x	32x/16x/10x	Windows XP Home, StarOffice, BigFix
10 Systemax A1800RV Lifestyle 1280 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk	9	Dec 01	196 (WB 2000)	£1,239	1-year onsite, 2-year return to base	AMD Athlon XP 1800+/ 1.53GHz	256MB DDR RAM	Western Digital/40GB	MSI K7T266	Via KT266	56K	2	CTX PR960F	19in	0.24mm	1,600x1,200	Systemax GeForce3	nVidia GeForce3	64MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394	Cambridge DTT2200	5/Y	16x	32x/16x/10x	Windows XP, Lotus SmartSuite Millennium

1 Evesham Axis 1900+

Evesham retains its position at the top of the chart for another month. Despite a price increase, caused by a cost hike for DDR (double data rate) RAM, it's still an attractive, value for money option. Add a three-year onsite warranty into the mix and you have a worthy winner of our Best Buy award.

With the exception of the ergonomic keyboard and optical mouse, the Axis is a fairly plain-looking system, but one glance

↓ The Evesham Axis 1900+ combines good features with value for money to win the Best Buy award



under the hood left us in no doubt that this was a powerhouse of a PC. One of AMD's second-fastest processors, the Athlon XP 1900+, is twinned with 512MB of DDR RAM and storage is provided by a capacious 80GB hard drive.

The Evesham's WorldBench 4 score of 117 isn't the fastest in the chart, but the top contenders are all close in terms of performance. The 19in Samsung 957 DF monitor utilises shadow mask rather than aperture grille technology, so the display isn't as bright or colourful compared to some of the competition. That said, the 1,600x1,200 resolution at 75Hz support and its 0.24mm dot pitch are decent enough, giving a crisp, detailed picture.

The Radeon 8500 LE card means that graphics are impressive. Sound is well catered for by the Audigy sound card with built-in FireWire port, and the ever-popular Cambridge SoundWorks DTT2200 speakers are proficient. The Axis' internal components are easily accessed and Evesham backs this up with a Pinnacle software bundle, which includes a video-editing program.

2 Atlas Meridian 1700+ PV05

Atlas takes second place this month with the Meridian 1700+ PV05, showing you don't have to break the bank to get a well specified system. Integrated video and audio previously meant skimping on graphics and sound, but nVidia's nForce chipset changes all that. While you won't get top-of-the-range performance, the onboard video is more than sufficient for the average gamer.

Roughly equivalent to a GeForce2 MX card, the Meridian offers good performance at 1,024x768. It's less impressive at higher resolutions, but for the price you can't really argue. Similarly, the onboard sound offers full 5.1 support, so you can make full use of the decent bundled Creative DTT220 surround sound speakers.

The Athlon XP 1700+ may not be the fastest chip available on the market, but its WorldBench 4 score of 116 shows it's perfectly adequate for everyday use. You'll also find 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM inside, plus a 40GB Maxtor hard drive, both of which should be more



↑ The Atlas Meridian 1700+ PV05 slips effortlessly into second place with a good all round setup

than enough for your work and storage. The 17in LG 775FT monitor offers a crisp 0.24mm dot pitch and an excellent flat display with a maximum resolution of 1,024x768 at 75Hz. You can push it up to 1,280x1,024, although you have to drop down to a less satisfactory 60Hz. Atlas has even found room in the budget to throw in a TV card, Logitech cordless keyboard and mouse and a copy of Microsoft Works Suite 2002.

All in all, at just £799 the Recommended Atlas Meridian 1700+ PV05 represents splendid value for money.

3 Mesh Matrix XP 1800 Ti

The Matrix XP 1800 Ti fits well with Mesh's tradition of producing well-rounded, good-value PCs with thorough documentation for the novice user. Although it drops another place this month, don't be put off – the Matrix XP remains an excellent system.

The Mesh doesn't boast the fastest processor around, but its Athlon XP 1800+ is the second speediest processor in the chart. It's also one of only four Budget machines to have 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM. The subsequent WorldBench 4 score of 121 makes the Matrix XP 1800 Ti an impressive performer – the second fastest PC in the Budget PC chart.

Storage is provided by a 60GB hard drive, and the speedy Teac CD-RW drive will have your files backed up in no time. While the Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 740SB monitor can't offer the same screen real estate as a 19in model, it's certainly the best 17in display in the chart. Indeed, we'd rather see a good-quality smaller screen than a mediocre large one.



↑ The Mesh Matrix XP 1800 Ti drops to third place this month, but it's still a speedy performer

Twinned with a Leadtek WinFast GeForce3 Ti 200 graphics card, it provides excellent image quality.

As with most entries, the Mesh Matrix uses the solid SoundBlaster Live 5.1 card with Cambridge's DTT2200 speakers – probably the best value-for-money sound combination around. The software bundle isn't vast, but you do get Microsoft Works Suite 2001, which is enough to get you started. The Matrix XP's combination of power, good-quality components and a generous three-year onsite warranty makes it worthy of a Recommended award.

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NEW

↑ The Systemax A1900AD offers good graphics, excellent sound and the ability to play DVDs

4 Systemax A1900AD

Systemax takes the last Recommended award, with its blend of new graphics technology, DVD playback and video manipulation. The A1900AD has 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and a 1.6GHz AMD Athlon 1900+ chip, whose WorldBench 4 score of 116 outpaces a higher clocked Pentium 4.

Crystal clear audio is delivered by the Creative SoundBlaster Audigy card, and Videologic ZXR-500 speakers. The ATI-TV card is a nice touch, but what's really new about this PC is the inclusion of a GeForce4 MX-440 card. However, while it may be hot off the production line, its frame rates are still marginally inferior to the many Ti 200 and 500 cards.

Graphics are displayed on a colourful 19in CTX EX950F monitor with good picture quality, though its clarity is lacking. The Samsung drives are ample and it has a FireWire port and four USB connectors, two on the front of the console. A three-year warranty ensures peace of mind.

5 Multivision Vision Ultima Ti 200

With a fast 1900+ Athlon XP chip, 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and 7,200rpm (revolutions per minute) 60GB hard drive, the Ultima Ti 200 is a powerful system, clocking up a WorldBench 4 score of 118, not the fastest but still creditable.

Though the Vision is primed for power, Multivision hasn't forgotten the rest of the package. If you've got lots of peripherals, the six USB ports should prove invaluable. A fast 40-/24-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) CD-RW drive provides extra backup, and the Creative SoundBlaster Live 5.1 card and DTT2200 speakers take care of the audio. The 64MB DDR RAM GeForce3 Ti 200 graphics card from Hercules and 19in monitor produce crisp, smooth graphics.

A generous software bundle and some nice extras, such as a webcam, redeem the lack of documentation, but perhaps not the one-year onsite warranty.



↑ Multivision's Vision Ultima is a powerful system with six USB ports to hook up lots of peripherals



↑ The Systemax A1900FA has a low WorldBench 4 score of 114 probably due to lack of memory

6 Systemax A1900FA

Systemax's 1.6GHz Athlon XP 1900+ is twinned with 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and a 60GB hard drive, which provides plenty of storage. Unfortunately, this relatively low amount of memory only provides a low WorldBench 4 score of 114.

Using one of the best chipsets currently available, the GeForce3 Ti 500 easily takes care of the Systemax's graphics performance. Aiding image quality is a CTX 19in monitor, which handles pictures with aplomb. To get the most out of the graphical prowess of this PC, there's a games bundle and gamepad.

The Audigy sound card and Cambridge DTT2200 speakers provide high-quality audio, and there's a FireWire port at the back of the PC, but only two USB ports which seems a bit miserly. The large case means the components aren't cramped, which leaves lots of space for upgrading in the future.

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↑ The Ideal Aptus has the fastest WorldBench score, but is let down by the poor quality monitor

7 Ideal Computing Ideal Aptus 1800XP

The Ideal Aptus 1800XP is one of the best-looking systems in our Budget chart. This may be due in part to an LG monitor with more style than substance, but the Audigy sound card proves its beauty is more than skin deep. Ideal Computing has opted for 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and backed it up with a 1.53GHz Athlon XP 1800+ processor, producing the fastest WorldBench 4 score of 123.

There's ample storage from a 60GB hard drive and one of the fastest CD-RW drives around. Graphically, the GeForce3 Ti 500 is brilliant, but the LG 775FT monitor, which only reaches 1,280x1,024 resolution and is hampered by a low refresh rate, doesn't match it. The Creative Labs Audigy has two FireWire ports but, like the Systemax, there are only two USB ports. The bundled StarOffice suite is also only adequate.

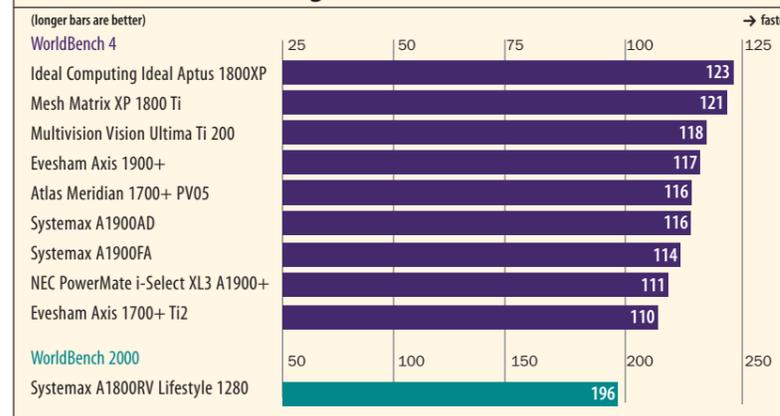
8 NEC PowerMate i-Select XL3 A1900+

The PowerMate from NEC only narrowly missed out on a higher chart position. NEC decided to stick with Windows 98

↓ The NEC PowerMate is a good package, but suffers from a low-speed CD-RW drive



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SE, rather than XP Home, as its operating system, but hasn't scrimped on most of the specifications. Its 1.6GHz processor is joined by 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM and one of the largest hard drives in the chart – 80GB.

The PowerMate's WorldBench 4 score of 111 is good, but would have benefitted from extra memory. NEC's own excellent 19in monitor combines with a 64MB GeForce3 graphics card, so image quality is spot on, though a GeForce3 Ti card would give smoother graphics rendering. The PowerMate has a three-year onsite warranty and is a well considered package. The only gripes are the low-speed CD-RW drive and poor speakers – they are from Labtec, but paltry for a £1,199 PC.

9 Evesham Axis 1700+ Ti2

Unusually for an Evesham, the Ti2 doesn't have enough high-end components to keep up with the competition. While the 1.47GHz processor is faster than previous models, there's only 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM. The hard drive is also smaller than in the past – just 40GB. This all produced a WorldBench 4 score of 110, the slowest in our chart. The 17in Samsung 107FT monitor is clear and bright and is matched by the 64MB GeForce2 Ti graphics card. The DVI (digital visual interface) port can be connected to the flat-panel display, but gamers should look elsewhere for high-end graphics. There's a plethora of FireWire and USB ports for connecting. The warranty is good, as are the manual and software bundle.



↑ With the slowest WorldBench score the Evesham Axis just couldn't compete with the competition

10 Systemax A1800RV Lifestyle 1280

While Windows Me may soon be a thing of the past, the A1800RV contains an Athlon XP 1800+ backed up by 256MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, which is still impressive. However, the WorldBench 2000 score of 196 has been surpassed by faster PCs. With a 64MB GeForce3 graphics card and sound provided by the Audigy, this is a consumer PC. If that weren't evidence enough, the 1280 also comes with a games bundle and gamepad.

↓ Systemax's A1800RV Lifestyle provides good graphics and comes with a large games bundle



The right operating system

The choice of operating systems has slimmed down significantly since the launch of Windows XP. Where once you could choose from Windows 98, Me, 2000 and NT, now Microsoft would hope that the options have come down to Windows XP Home or Pro. This isn't quite the case as Windows 2000 is still on offer on some high-end PCs and notebooks, while NT is championed by many business users.

However, the average desktop PC will come with one of the two flavours of XP. Essentially, these two operating systems have the same core, but Home looks a bit prettier and Pro is optimised for a business environment, with improved network support.

When it comes to performance, this standardisation of Windows seems to mean much more consistent results. In the past we found that similar PCs running Windows Me and 98 could not match up to the performance of those using Windows 2000. Now the performance gap between business and home operating systems has all but closed and scores for both XP Home and Pro seem to be much the same, assuming the PCs' specifications match.

In some cases however, Windows 2000 does give a minor performance improvement on XP, but then again sticking with an older operating system does mean you miss out on all the extras offered by upgrading.